

Questions & on Answers Sponsorship



ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS® is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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Questions & Answers on Sponsorship

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What is sponsorship?

Alcoholics Anonymous began with sponsorship. When Bill W. was only a few months sober, he was stricken with a powerful urge to drink and the thought came to him: “You need another alcoholic to talk to. You need another alcoholic just as much as he needs you!”

He found Dr. Bob, who had been trying desperately and unsuccessfully to stop drinking, and out of their common need A.A. was born. The word “sponsor” was not used then; the Twelve Steps had not been written; but Bill carried the message to Dr. Bob, who in turn safeguarded his own sobriety by sponsoring countless other alcoholics. Through sharing, both of our co-founders discovered that their own sober lives could be enriched beyond measure.

What does A.A. mean by sponsorship? To join some organizations, you must have a sponsor — a person who vouches for you and presents you as being suitable for membership. This is definitely not the case with A.A. Anyone who has a desire to stop drinking is welcome to join us!

In A.A., sponsor and sponsored meet as equals, just as Bill and Dr. Bob did. Essentially, the process of sponsorship is this: An alcoholic who has made some progress in the recovery program shares that experience on a continuous, individual basis with another alcoholic who is attempting to attain or maintain sobriety through A.A.

When we first begin to attend A.A. meetings, we may feel confused, sick, and apprehensive. Although people at meetings respond to our questions willingly, that alone isn’t enough. Many other questions occur to us between meetings; we find that we need constant, close support as we begin learning how to “live sober.”

So we select an A.A. member with whom we can feel comfortable, someone with whom we can talk freely and confidentially, and we ask that person to be our sponsor.

Whether you are a newcomer who is hesitant about “bothering” anyone, or a member who has been around for some time trying to go it alone, sponsorship is yours for the asking. We urge you: *Do not delay.* Alcoholics recovered in A.A. want to

share what they have learned with other alcoholics. We know from experience that our own sobriety is greatly strengthened when we give it away!

Sponsorship responsibility is unwritten and informal, but it is a basic part of the A.A. approach to recovery from alcoholism through the Twelve Steps. Sponsorship can be a longterm relationship.

We hope that this pamphlet will provide answers to some of the often-asked questions about the rewarding two-way street called sponsorship for people who may be seeking sponsors, for A.A. members who want to share their sobriety through sponsorship, and for groups looking to foster sponsorship activity. (see *What procedures can a group set up to sponsor new members?* page 23)

For the person seeking a sponsor

How does sponsorship differ from Twelfth Step calls?

A Twelfth Step call — visiting an alcoholic who has asked for help and talking about the A.A. program with them— may become the *beginning* of sponsorship, but by itself, it is not necessarily sponsorship.

Sponsorship, with its *continuing* interest in another alcoholic, often develops when the prospect is willing to be helped, admits having a drinking problem, and decides to seek sobriety as a solution.

Sponsorship is Twelfth Step work, but it is also *continuing responsibility* for helping a newcomer adjust to a way of life without alcohol.

How does sponsorship help the newcomer?

It assures the newcomer that there is at least one person who understands the situation fully and cares — one person to turn to without embarrassment when doubts, questions, or problems linked to alcoholism arise. Sponsorship gives the newcomer a compassionate and empathetic friend when one is needed most. Sponsorship also provides the bridge enabling the new person to meet other alcoholics — in a home group and other groups visited.

How should a sponsor be chosen?

The process of matching newcomer and sponsor is as informal as everything else in A.A. Often, the new person simply approaches a more experienced member who seems compatible and asks that member to be a sponsor. Most A.A.s are happy and grateful to receive such a request.

An old A.A. saying suggests, “Stick with the winners.” It’s only reasonable to seek a sharing of experience with a member who seems to be using the A.A. program successfully in everyday life. There are no specific rules, but a good sponsor should probably be a year or more away from the last drink — and should seem to be *enjoying* sobriety.

Should sponsor and newcomer be as much alike as possible?

Often, a newcomer feels most at ease with a sponsor of similar background and interests. However, many A.A.s say they were greatly helped by sponsors totally unlike themselves. Maybe that’s because their attention was then focused on the *most important* things that any sponsor and newcomer have in common: alcoholism and recovery in A.A.

A.A. experience does suggest that it is best for men to sponsor men and women to sponsor women. This custom usually helps our members stay focused on the A.A. program. Some gay men and lesbians feel an opposite-sex sponsor is more appropriate for similar reasons.

Must the newcomer agree with everything the sponsor says?

No. If the sponsor’s ideas sound strange or unclear, the newcomer can speak up and ask questions. Theirs is supposed to be an easy, open relationship in which both parties talk freely and honestly with each other. It is essential that the newcomer can share their experiences in an atmosphere free of judgment.

The A.A. program is simple, but it didn’t seem that way to many of us at first. Often, we learned by asking questions at closed meetings or — most especially — in conversations with our sponsors.

What if the sponsor is unavailable when needed?

It is the whole A.A. program — not the individual's sponsor — that maintains the newcomer's sobriety. Sponsorship is just the best way we know of introducing a newcomer to the program and helping them continue in A.A.

We have many options when we are unable to contact our sponsors. We can call or text other members, go to an A.A. meeting, or call or visit the nearest central office or intergroup. We can read A.A. books or pamphlets or listen to the audio version of this material at aa.org. Another resource are our magazines, the AA Grapevine (in English) and La Viña (in Spanish). Members may search in the Grapevine app to find answers for almost any troubling problem. The AA Grapevine app is available to download where you obtain apps.

May a newcomer have more than one sponsor?

Many feel it is best for a newcomer to have only one sponsor. Choosing one sponsor helps to avoid the precarious practice of a newcomer going from sponsor to sponsor seeking the advice he or she wants to hear.

May a newcomer change sponsors?

We are always free to select another sponsor with whom we feel more comfortable, particularly if we believe this member will be more helpful to our growth in A.A.

If a person has been exposed to the Twelve Steps in a treatment program, will a sponsor still be recommended?

Regardless of how long it has been since a newcomer's last drink or their prior experiences with treatment programs, the mental obsession with alcohol may persist. A.A. groups that have welcomed such newcomers generally agree that establishing sponsorship as early as possible is essential in helping to overcome this obsession.

This newcomer may have learned many medical facts about the disease of alcoholism. But learning about alcoholism in an institutional setting is one thing, and functioning as a sober alcoholic in a drinking world is quite another. The

sponsor's personal experience can enable the newcomer to find guidance in applying A.A. principles to every-day life — just as any other newcomer who arrives at A.A.'s doors for help.

Is it ever too late to get a sponsor?

No. An A.A. who has been in — or “around” the Fellowship for many years often finds that getting a good sponsor, talking frankly, and listening can make the whole program open up as it never did before. Most A.A.s feel that sponsorship is a vital part of their ongoing growth and progress in recovery, including persons who have long-term sobriety.

Sponsorship can be the answer for the person who has been able to achieve only interludes of sobriety or who has attended meetings casually but has not really taken the First Step. For such a person, a sponsor with a firm grounding of sobriety in A.A. can make all the difference.

Even if we have many dry years behind us, we can often benefit by asking an A.A. friend to be our sponsor. We may have been feeling discontentment or real emotional pain because we forgot that the A.A. program offers a whole new way of life, not just freedom from alcohol. With a sponsor's help, we can use the program to the full, change our attitudes, and, in the process, come to enjoy our sobriety.

**For the person wanting
to be a sponsor**

How does sponsorship help the sponsor?

Sponsorship plays a vital role in reinforcing the sponsor's own sobriety. Sharing their experience, strength, and hope with another person helps them stay connected to the principles of A.A. and makes living without alcohol more manageable. By helping others, alcoholics find they are also helping themselves.

Sponsorship also offers the satisfaction that comes from assuming responsibility for someone other than oneself. In a very real sense, it fills the need, felt by most human beings, to help others over rough spots.

Can any member be a sponsor?

Yes, any A.A. member can become a sponsor. There are no special qualifications, ranks, or superior status required in A.A. Any member can help the newcomer learn to cope with life without resorting to alcohol in any form.

In most instances, A.A. custom does suggest one limitation: sponsorship should be avoided whenever a romantic entanglement might arise between sponsor and sponsee. We A.A. members, no matter how long we have been sober, remain thoroughly human, subject to emotions that might divert us from “our primary purpose.”

When is a member ready for sponsorship responsibility?

Our primary purpose is to carry the message of A.A. to the alcoholic who still suffers. A.A. members who have worked the Steps of A.A. as a way to attain sobriety are often in the best position to share their experience, strength and hope. The most successful sponsors seem to be those who have been in A.A. long enough to have a good understanding of the A.A. program outlined in the Twelve Steps. Many of us think it wise to seek advice from our own sponsors about when we may be ready to take on the responsibility of sponsoring another alcoholic.

The member who has been sober for months or years is usually — but not always — able to work more effectively with newcomers than the members whose experience is limited to only a few weeks or days. Thus, length of sobriety is a factor, but not the only factor, in successful sponsorship. Just as importantly, the sponsor should have the capacity for empathy, compassion, and patience, and should be willing to devote time and effort to new members.

What does a sponsor do and not do?

- A sponsor makes their best effort, within the limits of personal experience and knowledge, to help the newcomer get sober and stay sober through the A.A. program.
- Shows by present example and drinking history what A.A. has meant in the sponsor's life.
- Encourages, and if necessary, helps the newcomer to attend a variety of A.A. meetings — to

get a number of viewpoints and interpretations of the A.A. program.

- Suggests keeping an open mind about A.A. if the newcomer isn't sure at first whether they are an alcoholic.
- Introduces the newcomer to other members.
- Sees that the newcomer is aware of A.A. literature, in particular the Big Book, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, AA Grapevine, *As Bill Sees It*, *Living Sober*, and suitable pamphlets.
- Is available to the newcomer when personal matters arise that might affect their sobriety.
- Goes over the meaning of the Twelve Steps and emphasizes their importance.
- Urges the newcomer to join in group activities as soon as possible.
- Impresses upon the newcomer the importance of all our Traditions.
- Emphasizes the relevance and spiritual value of anonymity, both on a person-to-person basis, as well as at the public level, including social media. (For information, see the pamphlet, "Understanding Anonymity.")
- Tries to give the newcomer some picture of the scope of A.A. beyond the group and directs attention to A.A. literature about the history of the Fellowship, the Three Legacies, the service structure, and the worldwide availability of A.A. — wherever the newcomer may go.
- Is available to explain the program to relatives of the alcoholic, if this appears to be useful, and tells them about Al-Anon Family Groups and Alateen.
- Understands that their sponsee may have had life experiences (cultural challenges, domestic violence, parenting problems, racism, trauma, are some examples.) that they, themselves, are not familiar with and can quickly admit, "I don't know." Sponsors can help the newcomer see how their problems can be addressed using AA tools and can also help the sponsee see when outside resources might be appropriate.
- Does not pretend to know all the answers and does not keep up a pretense of being right all the time.
- The sponsor encourages the newcomer to work with other alcoholics as soon as possible and sometimes begins by taking the newcomer along on Twelfth Step calls.

- Never takes the newcomer's inventory except when asked.
- Never tries to impose personal views on the newcomer. A good sponsor who is an atheist does not try to persuade a religious newcomer to abandon faith, nor does a religious sponsor argue theological matters with an agnostic newcomer.
- An A.A. sponsor does not offer professional services such as those provided by counselors, the legal, medical, or social work communities, but may sometimes help the newcomer to access professional help if assistance outside the scope of A.A. is needed.
- Stresses the importance of A.A. being a safe place for all members and encourages members to become familiar with service material available from the General Service Office, such as "Safety and A.A. Groups."

The sponsor underscores the fact that it is the A.A. recovery program — not the sponsor's personality or position — that is important. Thus, the newcomer learns to rely on the A.A. program, not the sponsor. A sponsor well-grounded in the A.A. program will not be offended if the newcomer goes to other A.A. members for additional guidance or even decides to change sponsors.

Is there any one best way of sponsoring a newcomer?

The answer is no. All members are free to approach sponsorship as their own individual experiences and personalities may suggest. Some sponsors adopt a more or less brusque, "Take it or leave it" approach in dealing with newcomers. Others exhibit extreme patience and great personal interest in the people they sponsor. Still others are somewhat casual, content to let the new person take the initiative in asking questions or seeking help in special situations.

Newcomers sometimes have personal and authentic life experiences which can adversely affect how they respond to different approaches to sponsorship. It can be helpful if the experienced sponsor is flexible enough to recognize this and is willing to try different approaches to identify which approach, or approaches, they might respond to best.

How can a sponsor explain the A.A. program?

Sponsors will want to explain A.A. in the manner that each finds most natural and most likely to be clear to the newcomer at hand.

Some sponsors find that reminding the newcomer of the First Step — that they are powerless over alcohol and that their lives had become unmanageable — is key to a successful recovery. Many sponsors make it a point to emphasize that together they can do what they could not do alone — stay away from the first drink.

These sponsors remind the newcomer that A.A. offers a *practical* program, and that it has already helped millions of people. They suggest the need for open-mindedness in facing alcoholism as a personal problem, and they underscore the fact that it is up to the newcomer alone to decide whether he or she is an alcoholic and whether A.A. can help.

Nearly all members who work with newcomers relate the A.A. program to the newcomer in terms of their own experience. They tell the new person that no one speaks for A.A. and that every member is perfectly free to arrive at their own individual understanding of the program.

Some sponsors talk about the program in a more spiritual way than others do. But nearly all call attention to the source of strength to be found in “a Power greater than ourselves.” Again, the sponsor points out that it is up to the newcomer to determine what that A.A. phrase means. It expresses an idea that people of many faiths — or of no particular faith — can and do accept with complete harmony.

Many sponsors discuss the significance of anonymity at a personal level and public level early on. Anonymity at a personal level provides protection for all members from the identification as alcoholics, a safeguard often of special importance to newcomers. At the public level of press, radio, films, and other media technologies, such as the internet, anonymity stresses the equality in the Fellowship of all members by putting the brake on those who might otherwise exploit their A.A. affiliation to achieve recognition, power, or personal gain. The sponsor is quick to point

out the benefit of anonymity at this public level. Sponsors may provide examples from their own experience of maintaining public anonymity.

Should a sponsor recommend hospitalization?

The important thing to remember is that hospitalization is not part of the A.A. program and that a doctor, not a sponsor, is the person who should say whether it is required. Experienced sponsors are careful not to set themselves up as substitutes for doctors in dealing with any phase of alcoholism.

An A.A. oldtimer offers this reminder: Hospitalization or other professional care given to a newcomer “does not in any way lessen the responsibility of the A.A. member to carry the message in the best way possible and to furnish good sponsorship. It is not good A.A. simply to dump an alcoholic into the lap of others because we do not have enough time or because the alcoholic is troublesome and demanding. Most of us recall with gratitude the enduring patience and great kindness experienced members showed to us when we were new ourselves.”

In other words, many of us have learned the valuable lesson of tolerance by being tolerated.

How can a sponsor work with an alcoholic's family?

The sponsor can explain the A.A. program to a spouse, partner or relative and point out that most members have found it easier to live a life without alcohol when their relatives took an interest in A.A., became familiar with A.A. literature, and attended open meetings of a local group.

In general, the sponsor can help the alcoholic's family give the newcomer every chance to make good in A.A. and can urge the family not to expect too much, too soon, from the recovering alcoholic.

In some cases, family relationships have slipped seriously as a result of the alcoholic's behavior while drinking. The sponsor should not act like a professional counselor in such situations. However, many threatened relationships have been saved once the primary problem of alcoholism has been brought under control, and the sponsor can point this out.

The sponsor will also want the family to know about Al-Anon Family Groups and Alateen, made up of relatives and friends of alcoholics.

The Al-Anon program parallels A.A.'s but Al-Anon is an entirely separate fellowship. It helps relatives of problem drinkers to understand the illness and its effect on family life. In Alateen — a part of Al-Anon — teenagers who have alcoholic parents share their own experiences. Local groups of Al-Anon and Alateen meet regularly in many communities.

Al-Anon literature and meeting information can be found online at alanon.org, by phone at 888-425-2666, or by mail to 1600 Corporate Landing Pkwy., Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617.

Should a sponsor lend money to a newcomer?

This is, of course, a matter of individual judgment and decision. Involved in it is the basic fact that A.A. has a single purpose: to help alcoholics with their drinking problem. A.A. is not a philanthropic or job-finding society.

Money, or the lack of it, has never been a key factor in an individual's ability to get sober in A.A.

The sponsor who lends money to a newcomer does so at risk and may even be slowing down the new person's progress toward sobriety. The newcomer who turns to A.A. for money, clothes, or assurance of employment is coming to the wrong place for the wrong thing. A.A. has something far more important to offer: sobriety.

Professional agencies can furnish other kinds of help if needed. But many alcoholics, *when sober*, can solve their own domestic, vocational, or legal problems.

Should a sponsor intercede with an employer?

By the time an alcoholic turns to A.A., they may already have lost a job or be in danger of losing one. If there is a job, it may involve working for an employer who is uninformed about problem drinkers and knows little or nothing about A.A.

Whether or not a sponsor should intercede to preserve another alcoholic's job depends upon the individual circumstances of each case. A surprising number of employers, anxious to restore

competent employees to maximum efficiency, welcome the news that a worker has turned to A.A. and are interested in knowing more about the recovery program.

An informative pamphlet, "Is There a Problem Drinker in the Workplace?," has been prepared to acquaint employers with the help that A.A. can offer.

Can a sponsor be too firm?

Some sponsors believe in being fairly blunt with a newcomer. They describe the A.A. program as they understand it. They explain what A.A. has meant to them. They point out that there is no known *cure* for alcoholism but that it *can be arrested*.

Having done these things, they leave the next move up to the newcomer. If the still-drinking alcoholic does not reach a decision immediately to join A.A., this sponsor believes in letting the situation alone.

This approach is not totally unsympathetic. Many alcoholics respect it and recognize it as an attempt to be completely factual about A.A. to avoid emotion.

The A.A. program is based on certain tested principles, which a newcomer may disregard only at risk. Firm sponsorship emphasizes this and usually works well in convincing the newcomer. Most A.A.s, however, recognize that firmness overdone can alienate a newcomer. This may be particularly true for those who have experienced domestic abuse, genocide, racism, and other forms of trauma. Firmness should be tempered with compassion, empathy, patience, respect, and assurance of trust.

Can a sponsor be overprotective?

Some sponsors may be overprotective in their enthusiasm to help a newcomer achieve sobriety. They worry unduly about the persons they sponsor and tend to smother them with attention. In doing so, they may run the risk of having a newcomer depend on an individual member rather than on the A.A. program. This may be particularly dangerous for newcomers who have previously experienced only unhealthy relationships. The most effective sponsors recognize that

alcoholics who join A.A. must eventually stand on their own feet and make their own decisions — and that there is a difference between helping people to their feet and insisting on holding them up thereafter.

Another danger of overprotectiveness is that it may annoy the newcomer to the point of resenting the attempts to help — and expressing that resentment by turning away from A.A.

Can a sponsor be too casual?

Some sponsors prefer to adopt a casual attitude toward newcomers with whom they work. For example, they are perfectly willing to spend time with the new member who asks for it but rarely take the time or trouble to call between meetings or help the newcomer get to meetings.

Some newcomers actually flourish best left pretty much on their own. But there may be some danger in this approach: A timid or reserved newcomer may conclude that the group and the individual sponsor are not interested in helping. If a sponsor senses or discovers the sponsee has a history of trauma, the sponsor may helpfully share their own experience or encourage the sponsee to talk with another A.A. member who has similar experiences. Sponsors can also help sponsees seek out A.A. literature that addresses the issue.

Many present members report that they did not make a firm decision to adopt the A.A. program until months or years after their first contact with A.A., simply because they were allowed to drift away from the group. A growing number of groups try to avoid this by establishing a program for following up with newcomers during a period of weeks or months after an initial approach is made to the group (see page 25).

How can a sponsor handle an overdependent newcomer?

In the first days of sobriety, a newcomer is sometimes so bewildered and frightened — or so mentally fuzzy and physically weak — that they need to be taken to each meeting and perhaps helped in making personal decisions. But such utter dependence on the sponsor, when carried past the earliest stages of recovery, often becomes damaging to

both parties. It has already been pointed out that we stay sober through reliance on the A.A. program, not on any one member, so the newcomer's chances in this situation may not be very good. And the sponsor may either feel harried by constant, unreasonable demands or feel flattered and let the ego build up dangerously.

How can this dilemma be solved without leaving the newcomer disheartened? Many A.A.s, when first asked to sponsor, will have met with the newcomer and reviewed this pamphlet in an effort to avoid pitfalls. Most likely, the sponsor and newcomer will have discussed their commitments and agreed-upon expectations early in the relationship. The sponsor will also have encouraged the newcomer to talk to other A.A. members with longer-term sobriety. Now might be the time for a heartfelt talk in which the sponsor again explains the importance of relying on the entire A.A. program, as well as their concern regarding the overdependence of the newcomer. If this conversation fails to provide a solution, the sponsor may offer to remain as a temporary sponsor until the newcomer can find a sponsor with whom they might develop a more balanced relationship. But be careful to know the total picture before suggesting such a course, which could be harmful to a sponsee who is just learning to trust the A.A. program and A.A. members.

How can a sponsor work with a newcomer who rejects help?

In most cases, there is little a sponsor can do except assure the newcomer of their willingness to help, when and if needed. Cultural differences can exacerbate issues of trust. Sponsors should be sensitive to the cultural background of the newcomer, which may make the newcomer suspicious or doubtful of what could sound like directions or orders. This lack of trust may seem like animosity or reluctance.

For these reasons, it may occasionally be wise to introduce the newcomer to an A.A. member who shares more of the newcomer's background and interests. Sponsorship is a flexible venture, and good sponsors are themselves flexible in working with new people. It is just as much a mistake to thrust unwanted help upon a newcomer as

it is to refuse to help when a newcomer asks for it.

What can sponsors do when newcomers resist “the spiritual side” of the program?

First, we can relax and remember that sponsorship does not mean forcing any specific beliefs upon newcomers. Most men and women who have been in A.A. for more than a few months recognize that its program is based on spiritual principles. At the same time, they appreciate that alcoholics have been able to achieve and maintain sobriety without any belief in a personal Higher Power.

Perhaps the sponsor might point out the distinction between the words “spiritual” and “religious.” As our Preamble says, A.A. is not allied with any sect or denomination, and no sort of religious belief is required for membership — only “a desire to stop drinking.” The sponsor may go on to let the newcomer know that in A.A., we have established a concept of individual spiritual freedom, which is not a religion or an organized faith but a concept based on the human need that respects each individual’s humble right to an individual spiritual life.

The help offered by our program is certainly neither material nor physical; we do not offer money or medicine — only ideas and the A.A. love of one alcoholic for another. In this sense, the entire program, rather than just a “side” of it, may be called “spiritual,” and almost any newcomer can appreciate a concept so broadly defined.

How should a sponsor deal with slips?

It can be most discouraging to work with a newcomer who gets sober for a period, then has a relapse or slip and starts drinking again. This can be a delicate, difficult time for both the sponsor and the newcomer. The sponsor may be tempted to consider the newcomer ungrateful or even to give up. Here, we sponsors need to look carefully into our own attitudes, to steer a middle course between harsh criticism that would only build up the newcomer’s remorse, and excessive sympathizing that would add to self-pity.

The newcomer, of course, may be even more discouraged and bewildered and may find it extremely difficult to return to the sponsor and the group for a fresh start. (For this reason, many sponsors believe it important to take the initiative and call the newcomer.) In order to make the return truly a new beginning, it may be wise at this point to avoid postmortems on the reasons for the slip. Instead, the sponsor can help guide the newcomer back to the simplicity of the First Step and the prime importance of staying away from the first drink just for the day at hand.

Later, the newcomer may want to check the kind of thinking that possibly led to the slip to guard against its recurrence. Here, the sponsor's role depends completely on the two people involved. If the sponsor was aware of the danger signals beforehand, one newcomer may say, "If only you had told me!" but another may rebel at the idea of having been "watched."

Regarded realistically, the slip can become a learning experience for both the person sponsored and the sponsor, emphasizing our one-day-at-a-time way of life. For the sponsor, it may serve as a push toward humility, a reminder that one person cannot keep another person sober and that the Twelfth Step says, "...we tried to carry this message...."

Most good sponsors emphasize that people who have slipped continue to be welcome in A.A. Successful sponsorship activity depends to a large degree on the understanding and love that the individual and group offer to a newcomer who may have one or more slips despite sincere efforts to achieve sobriety.

Can a member sponsor more than one newcomer simultaneously?

A.A. members differ in their enthusiasm for sponsorship work, in their ability to handle it effectively, and in the time they can give. Members who are willing and able to sponsor several newcomers simultaneously should certainly not be discouraged. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that sponsorship is, in a sense, a privilege to be shared by as many members as possible and an activity that helps all members to strengthen their sobriety.

Further, members who do too much sponsorship work may get exaggerated ideas about their abilities and may even risk their own sobriety. As in so many phases of A.A., common sense is the best guide.

How can a sponsor effectively work with newcomers who have intellectual or information-processing challenges, communication challenges, or diverse neurological abilities, including neurodivergence?

Sponsoring newcomers with intellectual or information-processing challenges, communication challenges, diverse neurological abilities, or neurodivergence can be successful with patience, flexibility, and a willingness to adapt. These types of learning differences aren't obstacles to be conquered through force of will or determination; they reflect the individual's natural way of processing information. Open communication will help sponsors to understand their sponsee's strengths, needs, and challenges.

The following short list of potential accommodations was created by members of Alcoholics Anonymous who identify as neurodivergent. It is not comprehensive but may help sponsors better understand some challenges experienced by sponsees with learning differences and initiate discussions with them:

- Be open to text communication instead of relying strictly on phone calls.
- Encourage sponsees to take responsibility for their program and set appropriate boundaries. The "always say yes to service and fellowship" mentality can harm and alienate neurodivergent individuals.
- Consider working on Step Four together. Being present while a sponsee writes or works (a practice known as "body doubling") can be helpful.
- Provide sponsees with speaker podcasts and audio resources from aa.org.
- Identify an emergency contact for the sponsor to reach out to, should the sponsee experience a mental health crisis.
- Recognize that many neurodivergent individuals interpret language literally. For example, explicitly explain the concept of a "God of your

own understanding” when discussing references to God in A.A. literature.

- Allow your sponsee to engage with meetings in the ways that best serve their needs. In online meetings, this could mean keeping their camera off. For in-person meetings, this could mean leaving early if overwhelmed, not holding hands, sitting in the back of the room, or using noise canceling headphones.
- Address emotional distress with compassion and support, offering a quiet space to decompress if available, and validating the sponsee’s feelings without judgment.

While sponsors are not trained professionals, these considerations can support a collaborative and compassionate relationship. In some cases, particular newcomers may also benefit from additional professional resources or tools alongside sponsorship.

Can I sponsor a person in custody?

Yes. Sponsorship can be provided in-person or through the mail. The “Methods Used to Provide Sponsorship to Members Behind the Walls” section of the Corrections Workbook includes shared experience. Contact with your local correction committee can provide more details about local practices.

For groups planning sponsorship activity

How does sponsorship help a group?

The primary purpose of an A.A. group is to carry the message of the recovery program to alcoholics who want and ask for help. Group meetings are one way of doing this. Sponsorship is another.

Some groups expand the idea of sponsorship to include helping alcoholics in nearby institutions and corresponding, with isolated members, international members, members in remote communities, and home-bound members.

Active sponsorship programs within a group remind all members of the group’s primary purpose. They serve to unite a group and keep it mindful of First Things First.

Sponsorship can also help a group create a welcoming and secure environment. Safety is an issue affecting all members because groups

need to remain accessible to all who are seeking recovery. Sponsorship can help keep the group focused on the common welfare.

What procedures can a group set up to sponsor new members?

Carefully planned sponsorship activity within a group is often likely to produce better results than sponsorship left to chance.

A typical pattern of planned sponsorship within a local group might include the following:

- A regular *committee on sponsorship* or a *Twelfth Step committee*, with members rotating frequently. If there is an intergroup or central office that keeps a list of local groups and the members available for Twelfth Step calls, such a committee may check to see whether the group has enough of its members on the office list to fulfill its responsibility.
- Regular *beginners meetings* (also called *newcomers meetings*) — particularly in larger communities where there are many newcomers. A Guide for Leading Beginners Meetings may be ordered from GSO on aa.org.
- Regular *assignment of members to greet newcomers* at meetings and introduce them around. In large groups, people on a hospitality committee may wear badges for the benefit of the newcomer. In smaller groups, the secretary may, during the announcements, simply ask newcomers to come up and make themselves known after the meeting so they may be introduced to other members.
- Another *suggested announcement*. “If any person here does not have a sponsor and wants one, please see the secretary, who will arrange a temporary sponsor.” Where this practice is followed at each meeting, members say, it reminds the group of the value of sponsoring and being sponsored.
- *Closed-meeting* discussions of sponsorship problems and opportunities. Some groups schedule meetings especially for this purpose.
- *Table display* of Conference-approved A.A. literature on recovery (including this pamphlet).
- *Study Chapter 7* in the Big Book (“Working With Others”).
- Regular procedure (carried out by the secre-

tary or the sponsorship committee) for *welcoming newcomers who have just left institutions*, treatment centers, or halfway houses. For instance, the secretary may receive word from the secretary of a prison group that a newly released person is about to attend a meeting, and the “outside” group is then alerted to the arrival of this newcomer. If it is feasible, a member of the group may even offer to meet the person immediately upon release.

How may “outside” A.A. groups help groups and members in institutions?

This subject is fully covered in the pamphlets “A.A. in Correctional Facilities” and “A.A. in Treatment Settings.” Also see Guidelines on Corrections Committees and Guidelines on Treatment Facilities Committees, Treatment Facilities Workbook, and Corrections Workbook, all available from GSO on aa.org.

Service Sponsorship

“...A.A. service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer — ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to A.A.’s General Service Office for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service.” — *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*.

Sponsorship in A.A. is basically the same, whether helping another individual’s recovery or service to a group. It can be defined as one alcoholic who has made some progress in recovery and/or performance in service, sharing this experience with another alcoholic who is just starting the journey. Both types of service spring from the spiritual aspects of the program.

Individuals may feel that they have more to offer in one area than in another. It is the service sponsor’s responsibility to present the various aspects of service: setting up a meeting, working on committees, participating in conferences, etc. In this matter, it is important for the service sponsor to help individuals understand the distinction between serving the needs of the Fellowship and meeting the personal needs of another group member.

A service sponsor is usually knowledgeable in A.A. history and has a strong background in the service structure. The A.A. member is introduced to a new language: GSR, DCM, area assembly, minority opinion. They will become familiar with the Traditions, Concepts and Warranties, as well as *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service, Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, and other A.A. literature.

The service sponsor begins by encouraging the member to become active in their home group — coffee, literature, cleanup, attending business or intergroup meetings, etc. The service sponsor should keep in mind that all members will not have the desire or qualifications to move beyond certain levels and thus, the service sponsor might help find tasks appropriate to individuals' skills and interests. Whatever level of service one performs, all are toward the same end — sharing the overall responsibilities of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Eventually, the service sponsor encourages the individual member interested in this form of service to attend district meetings and to read about the history and structure of Alcoholics Anonymous. At this point, the individual beginning this work should begin to understand the responsibilities of service work, as well as feel the satisfaction of yet another form of Twelfth Step work. Such individuals should be encouraged to take an active part in district activities and consider being elected to alternate positions in the district to learn about the responsibilities of various jobs in the service structure.

During this process, it is important for the individual to continue to learn about the Three Legacies — Recovery, Unity, and Service, and to understand that the principle of rotation not only allows them to move on in service, but also gives newer members the privilege of serving. Rotation also allows them to understand that no one should hold on to a position of trust long enough to feel a proprietary interest and thereby discourage newcomers from service.

Co-founder Dr. Bob said, "I spend a great deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly. I do it for four reasons:

1. Sense of duty.
2. It is a pleasure.
3. Because in doing so I am paying my debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me.
4. Because every time I do it I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip."

The basis of all sponsorship is to lead by example. Service sponsors can impart to their sponsees the pleasure of involvement in the work of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is best done by stressing the spiritual nature of service work and by pointing out the usefulness of simple footwork and faith.

Now, through knowledge and experience, the newer member is aware that service is our most important product after sobriety. With this knowledge, the individual is able to share their vision with others and ensure the future of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Summary

Most present members of Alcoholics Anonymous owe their sobriety to the fact that someone else took a special interest in them and was willing to share a great gift with them.

Sponsorship is merely another way of describing the continuing special interest of a seasoned member that can mean so much to a newcomer turning to A.A. for help.

Individuals and groups cannot afford to lose sight of the importance of sponsorship, the importance of taking a special interest in a confused, fearful, or traumatized newcomer who wants to stop drinking. Experience shows clearly that the members getting the most out of the A.A. program, and the groups doing the best job of carrying the A.A. message to still suffering alcoholics, are those for whom sponsorship is too important to be left to chance.

By these members and groups, sponsorship responsibilities are welcomed and accepted as *opportunities* to enrich personal A.A. experience and to deepen the satisfactions that come from working with others.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

THE TWELVE CONCEPTS FOR WORLD SERVICE

I. Final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.

II. The General Service Conference of A.A. has become, for nearly every practical purpose, the active voice and the effective conscience of our whole Society in its world affairs.

III. To insure effective leadership, we should endow each element of A.A. — the Conference, the General Service Board and its service corporations, staffs, committees, and executives — with a traditional *right of decision*.

IV. At all responsible levels, we ought to maintain a traditional “Right of Participation,” allowing a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.

V. Throughout our structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration.

VI. The Conference recognizes that the chief initiative and active responsibility in most world service matters should be exercised by the trustee members of the Conference acting as the General Service Board.

VII. The Charter and Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments, empowering the trustees to manage and conduct world service affairs. The Conference Charter is not a legal document; it relies upon tradition and the A.A. purpose for final effectiveness.

VIII. The trustees are the principal planners and administrators of overall policy and finance. They have custodial oversight of the separately incorporated and constantly active services, exercising this through their ability to elect all the directors of these entities.

IX. Good service leadership at all levels is indispensable for our future functioning and safety. Primary world service leadership, once exercised by the founders, must necessarily be assumed by the trustees.

X. Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority, with the scope of such authority well defined.

XI. The trustees should always have the best possible committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs, and consultants. Composition, qualifications, induction procedures, and rights and duties will always be matters of serious concern.

XII. The Conference shall observe the spirit of A.A. tradition, taking care that it never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds and reserve be its prudent financial principle; that it place none of its members in a position of unqualified authority over others; that it reach all important decisions by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that its actions never be personally punitive nor an incitement to public controversy; that it never perform acts of government, and that, like the Society it serves, it will always remain democratic in thought and action.

A.A. PUBLICATIONS Below is a partial listing of A.A. publications. Complete order forms are available from the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. Telephone: (212) 870-3400. Website: www.aa.org

BOOKS

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS
DAILY REFLECTIONS
AS BILL SEES IT
OUR GREAT RESPONSIBILITY
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS
'PASS IT ON'

BOOKLETS

LIVING SOBER
CAME TO BELIEVE
A.A. IN PRISON: A MESSAGE OF HOPE
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC — NEVER TOO LATE

PAMPHLETS

Experience, Strength and Hope:

WOMEN IN A.A.
BLACK IN A.A.
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN A.A.
YOUNG PEOPLE IN A.A.
LGBTQ ALCOHOLICS IN A.A.
THE "GOD" WORD: AGNOSTIC AND ATHEIST MEMBERS IN A.A.
A.A. FOR ALCOHOLICS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES —
AND THEIR SPONSORS
ACCESS TO A.A.: MEMBERS SHARE ON OVERCOMING BARRIERS
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?
MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY
HISPANIC WOMEN IN A.A.
BEHIND THE WALLS: A MESSAGE OF HOPE
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
(An illustrated pamphlet for those in custody)

About A.A.:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.
IS A.A. FOR ME?
IS A.A. FOR YOU?
A NEWCOMER ASKS
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?
THIS IS A.A.
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP
THE A.A. GROUP
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL
THE A.A. MEMBER — MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS
SELF-SUPPORT: WHERE MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY MIX
EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT US:
AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR TWELVE TRADITIONS
THE TWELVE STEPS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE WITH PROFESSIONALS
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS
BRIDGING THE GAP
A.A. TRADITION — HOW IT DEVELOPED
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY

For Professionals:

A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE
FOR THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
IS THERE A PROBLEM DRINKER IN THE WORKPLACE?
FAITH LEADERS ASK ABOUT A.A.
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

VIDEOS (available on www.aa.org)

A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
A NEW FREEDOM

For Professionals:

A.A. VIDEO FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR LEGAL AND CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR EMPLOYMENT/HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS

PERIODICALS

AA GRAPEVINE (monthly, www.aagrapevine.org)
LA VIÑA (bimonthly, in Spanish, www.aalavina.org)
ABOUT A.A. (digital-only, www.aa.org/about-aa)

A DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to A.A.'s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

I am responsible...

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there.

And for that: **I am responsible.**



Scan the QR code to learn more
about this pamphlet at

www.aa.org/questions-and-answers-sponsorship.

This is A.A. General Service
Conference-approved literature.

